

# CONSUMER FACT SHEET

## Billing

---

**Is my cable company allowed to bill me in advance?** Yes, Massachusetts regulations allow cable operators to bill subscribers up to two months in advance. However, most cable operators providing service in Massachusetts only require payment for one month in advance.

**When is payment for my cable bill due?** Massachusetts regulations require cable operators to include a specific due date on subscribers' bills. The due date must be at least five business days from the date the bill was mailed. Your bill should be paid by the specified due date.

**When is my account considered delinquent for non-payment?** A subscriber's account can be considered delinquent if payment has not been received by the cable operator thirty days after the due date shown on the subscriber's bill.

**Is my cable operator allowed to charge me a late fee?** Yes, but only after the following conditions are met: (1) a subscriber's account must be considered delinquent, meaning payment has not been received within thirty days from the bill due date; (2) the cable operator must provide the subscriber a written late charge notice; and (3) the subscriber must be given eight days from the date the amount becomes delinquent to pay the balance due. If an account meets these conditions, cable operators are allowed to charge up to five percent on the balance due in the form of a one-time late fee. A late fee cannot be imposed on any charge that is in dispute while the complaint mechanism outlined below is being followed.

**Is my cable operator allowed to disconnect my service for non-payment?** Cable operators are allowed to disconnect cable service for non-payment under the following conditions: (1) a subscriber's account must be considered delinquent; (2) the cable operator must give the subscriber a written termination notice; and (3) the subscriber must be given at least eight business days from the mailing date of the termination notice to pay the balance due.

**What can I do if I disagree with a charge on my cable bill?** Subscribers who disagree with a charge on their cable bill should contact the cable operator and the local Issuing Authority as outlined below:

1) Subscribers should immediately contact the cable operator to file a billing complaint. Under Massachusetts regulations, the cable operator must be contacted within thirty days from the due date shown on the subscribers' bill. The cable operator is required to investigate and respond with a decision within thirty working days of receipt of a billing complaint.

2) Some licenses negotiated between municipalities and cable operators provide that complaints should be brought directly to the local Issuing Authority. Therefore,

subscribers should also promptly contact their local Issuing Authority to determine whether there is a complaint resolution mechanism available under the license. If there is a complaint resolution mechanism, the Issuing Authority will work with the subscriber and the cable operator to resolve the situation. Your Issuing Authority is the Mayor, city manager, or Board of Selectmen of your city or town, depending on the form of government adopted locally.

If the subscriber is dissatisfied with the cable operator's decision and the Issuing Authority's resolution, the subscriber may file a petition with the Consumer Division of the Department of Telecommunications & Energy by telephone at 617-305-3531, or toll-free at 1-800-392-6066, or in writing at One South Station, Boston, Massachusetts 02110.

**Do I need to pay my cable bill when I am disputing a charge?** Yes, subscribers should pay the portion of the bill that is not in dispute. Subscribers who file a complaint with the cable operator are not required to pay any disputed charges while their complaint is being resolved. However, if the undisputed portion of the bill is not paid within thirty days, subscribers give up their right to dispute any portion of the bill, and the cable operator may assess late fees and proceed with disconnection.

**Is my cable operator allowed to charge me a fee to downgrade my cable service?** Cable operators are allowed to charge subscribers a reasonable fee to downgrade cable service. However, subscribers who request a downgrade within thirty days of receiving notice of a rate increase or a substantial change in service may not be charged a fee for the downgrade.

**Is my cable operator allowed to charge me a fee to disconnect my cable service?** No, however, a cable operator may charge a reconnect fee should the subscriber decide to obtain cable services at a later date. In addition, if a subscriber is disconnected for non-payment, a cable operator may charge a reconnect fee and require payment of the delinquent amount before reconnecting service.

**If I disconnect my cable service, will I get a refund for the amount I paid in advance?** Yes, cable operators are required to pay a prorated refund of any amounts that have been paid in advance. In order to ensure prompt receipt of the refund, you should request the refund at the time you request disconnection. Cable operators, in general, will not issue refunds until all equipment has been returned.

**Is my cable operator required to inform me of its specific billing practices?** Yes, cable operators are required to give you a written billing practices notice at the time you purchase cable service. A cable operator must also notify affected subscribers in writing thirty days prior to implementing any changes in its billing practices. Cable operators send copies of its billing practices notice to the Issuing Authority and the Cable Division annually, and the Issuing Authority should keep the notice available for public inspection. Your Issuing Authority is the Mayor, city manager, or Board of Selectmen of your city or town, depending on the form of government adopted locally.

**Is my cable operator allowed to raise my cable rates without notifying me?** Massachusetts regulations require that cable operators notify affected subscribers in writing thirty days prior to raising its rates or charges. This timeframe provides sufficient time for the subscriber to request a downgrade in cable service without incurring an additional charge. For more information regarding cable television rates, please see the Fact Sheet entitled Regulation of Cable Television Rates.

**Cable Television Division,  
Massachusetts Department of  
Telecommunications & Energy**  
One South Station  
Boston, MA 02110

**Website:** [www.state.ma.us/dpu/catv](http://www.state.ma.us/dpu/catv)  
**E-mail:** [cable.inquiry@state.ma.us](mailto:cable.inquiry@state.ma.us)

617-305-3580  
Toll-Free in Massachusetts: 1-888-MA-CBL-TV  
(1-888-622-2588)

Updated: June 4, 2002